



The Sullivan and Brodhead Expeditions

AFTER the Battle of Monmouth, on June 28, 1778, conventional combat between British and American forces in the Revolutionary War came for a time to an almost complete standstill. However, unconventional operations—Indian and Tory raiding against outlying settlements along the Pennsylvania and New York frontiers—greatly intensified. There were fierce attacks on Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley (July 3, 1778) and New York's Cherry Valley (November 10-11, 1778), and small-scale assaults became almost continuous. Settlers fled, crops went unharvested and unplanted, and the American army lost important sources of provisions.

Consequently, early in 1779, George Washington began planning a major campaign against the principal Indian enemy, the "Six Nations" of the Iroquois. As an old Indian-fighter, he knew that this foe was elusive and, therefore, not readily vulnerable to defeat in battle; but the Indians could be reached through destruction of their fields and villages, in a "scorched earth" operation which would reduce their capability to continue raiding, shake their confidence in their Tory allies, and make them dependent on the British for subsistence. Further, a successful inland campaign deep into enemy-dominated territory would provide a basis for claiming American sovereignty over more than the eastern seaboard when peace was eventually established.

The plan finally adopted had four parts. Maj. Gen. John Sullivan would assemble eleven Con-

tinental regiments at Easton, Pennsylvania, and march to Wyoming; then, carrying his supplies by boats and pack-horses, move up the North Branch of the Susquehanna to Tioga Point (modern Athens, Pennsylvania). Meanwhile, five regiments, under Brig. Gen. James Clinton, would gather at Otsego Lake, the source of the North Branch, and proceed downstream to join Sullivan. Then all sixteen regiments would advance into the Finger Lakes region, burning and destroying on the way, finally turning west to the Iroquois town of Genesee. The plan's final element was for Col. Daniel Brodhead, 8th Pennsylvania Regiment, to lead a smaller force from Fort Pitt up the Allegheny River. If feasible, he would continue into New York and contact Sullivan's column. At Sullivan's discretion, the entire force could then return, or it could go on to attack Fort Niagara, the British headquarters directing the Tory and Indian raids. Washington's intentions were clear. He said that "The immediate objective is their (the Iroquois') total destruction and devastation," so that "the country may not be merely overrun, but destroyed."

Because the operation involved movement far into wilderness regions, it required vast supplies and extensive transportation facilities. In fact, Washington started ordering these logistical arrangements to be initiated as early as February, hoping to see the campaign begin in May. But when Sullivan arrived at Easton, on May 7, he ran into delays. Only a fraction of the cattle (to be driven along for fresh meat) and the neces-

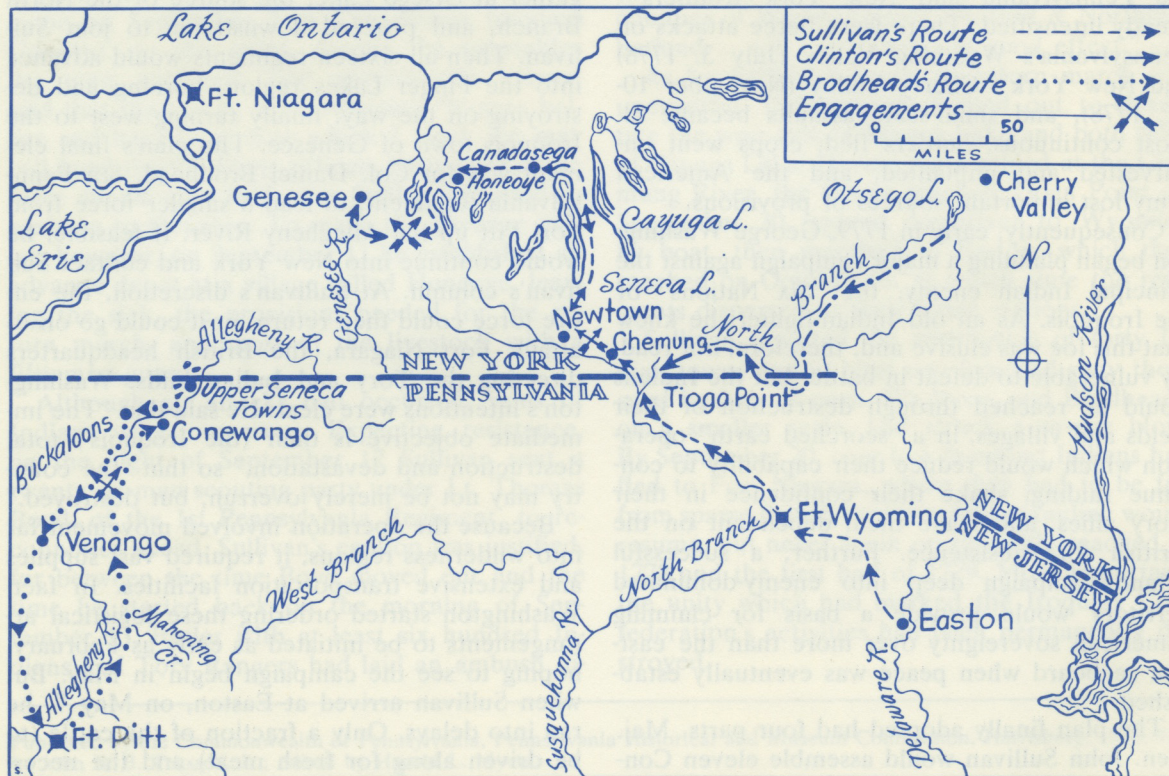
sary pack-horses had been collected. Flour and salt meat stocks were grossly inadequate, and much of what was available had spoiled. The boats that were supposed to be waiting at Wyoming had not even been built. Finally, the only link between Easton and Wyoming was a trail which was impassable for wagons or cannon.

Sullivan immediately put three regiments to work building a road. He also set about procuring such provisions and livestock as were locally available, while persistently bombarding the supply departments at Philadelphia with complaints and demands. Not until June 23, after the new road was completed, did he march to Wyoming.

More than another month passed before the supply build-up permitted the force to begin its movement. On July 31, however, numbering over 2,300 men, with 1,200 pack-horses and 700 to 900 cattle, accompanied by 120 boats, it started upstream. The narrow trail, at times leading along the face of mountains which dropped precipitously to the river, made for hard going and, according to one participant, "gave inconceivable Embarrassments to the Troops." Nevertheless, the army reached Tioga Point on August 11.

On that same day, Colonel Brodhead left Fort Pitt for his part of the campaign. With six hundred men, he went up the Allegheny to the mouth of Mahoning Creek, then struck overland, approximately due northward, reaching the Allegheny again sometime around August 18. As the twenty-three-man advance guard continued up the river, it suddenly met thirty to forty Indians, moving downstream in canoes, who made for shore to give battle. In the fight which followed, three soldiers were slightly wounded; five Indians were killed, the rest fleeing. On the next day, the whole force moved on to Buckaloons (near modern Youngsville), where the provisions for the return journey were left, guarded by a small breastwork and one company of soldiers. The remainder advanced to Conewango (modern Warren). From there, instead of following the curving river, they took a shorter, more direct line which brought them again to the Allegheny where eight villages known as the "upper Seneca towns" were located. They found these deserted, and spent the next three days demolishing the houses and destroying an estimated five hundred acres of corn.

Meanwhile, on August 13, Sullivan had probed





John Sullivan

with part of his force northward to the Indian town of Chemung. His advance guard was ambushed, losing seven killed and thirteen wounded, but the troops burned the town and destroyed the surrounding crops before returning to Tioga Point to wait for General Clinton's column to arrive. Sullivan, knowing that Indians were hovering nearby and being unsure of their numbers, on August 16 sent a nine hundred-man force eastward to contact Clinton and escort him to Tioga.

Clinton's five regiments, having left Otsego Lake on August 9, met this escort on August 19. The combined force reached Tioga Point three days later, welcomed by a thirteen-gun salute and "a Band of Musick which played Beautiful." Final preparations were completed, and on August 26 a column of about four thousand men, several hundred cattle, over a thousand pack-horses, and nine cannon started north. Staying behind to garrison the base camp were 250 soldiers, the women and children who had accompanied the army, and the civilian boatmen.

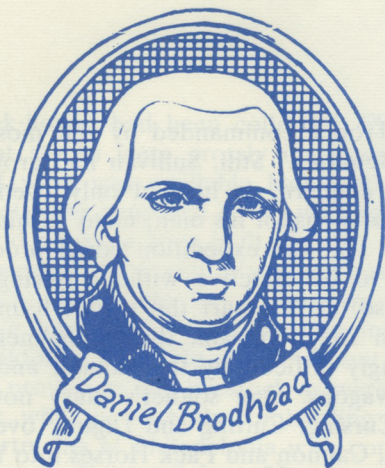
Sullivan's force was impressive, particularly for the time and even more so for the region. The Tory Lt. Col. John Butler, whose scouts were keeping the Americans under constant observation while he tried to rally Indians to oppose Sullivan's advance, reported to his superiors that "They are some of the best of the Conti-

mental Troops commanded by the most active Rebel Generals." Still, Sullivan had grounds for genuine concern, as he had only twenty-seven days' provisions for his men; many of his officers doubted that the expedition could proceed far enough to be effective without risking starvation. Also, at the start the troops found themselves in rough terrain, their movement made agonizingly difficult by the cannon and ammunition wagons. One soldier's diary noted that "Such Cursing, Cutting and Diging, over setting Wagons, Cannon and Pack Horses into the river &c is not to Be Seen Every Day."

On August 29, the force ran into substantial enemy resistance. Colonel Butler had gathered only four hundred Indians and three hundred Tory Rangers, and wanted to limit operations to harassing raids until more warriors could be accumulated, but the Indians insisted on making a stand. Just below the Indian village of Newtown (near modern Elmira, New York) they built and manned a breastwork extending eastward from the Chemung River, with another body of warriors posted some distance inland, on a hill.

Sullivan's leading brigade, consisting chiefly of Pennsylvania Continentals under Brig. Gen. Edward Hand, easily discovered the breastwork. While Hand kept the enemy preoccupied with musketry, Sullivan brought up the artillery and sent two brigades swinging to the right to turn the enemy left flank. The cannon were to remain silent for thirty minutes—time enough, Sullivan believed, for these brigades to move into position and then open fire, with all American troops converging simultaneously. As the engagement developed, the flanking brigades were slowed by a swamp and were not ready to attack when the artillery opened up. They had a brisk fight before driving the Indians off the hill, but the Indians behind the breastwork were terrified by the cannon fire and fled, many scattering to their home villages. American losses were four dead and thirty-nine wounded. Enemy casualties are uncertain, but the bodies of eleven warriors were found, and Butler admitted having two Tory Rangers killed.

Butler reported that "The Consequences of this affair will, I fear, be of the most serious nature"; and, indeed, he was never again able to rally enough Indians to oppose Sullivan's further movement. As for the Americans, one officer wrote in his journal that "No army can have higher spirits than ours resulting from victory



and a consciousness of superiority." Accordingly, Sullivan had a receptive group of soldiers for the proposal he felt compelled to make: pointing out the dwindling of supplies, he asked the men to agree to accept half rations, saying that the difference could be made up from vegetables now ripe in abandoned Indian fields, and promising that the men would be paid the value of the rations that were not issued. The proposal was unanimously accepted.

Delaying only to destroy the crops and villages—all abandoned—which they passed, the troops advanced up the east side of Seneca Lake. Turning west at the northern end of the lake, they came on September 7 to Canadasaga (modern Geneva). At this point, despite the vegetables the men gathered, one participant's journal said that the troops were suffering "hungry bellies and hard Duty now which I think we may call hard times." Some officers thought that the force should turn back, but Sullivan decided to push on to Genesee. To make the advance easier, however, on September 11 he established an advance depot at a village called Honeoye, leaving the sick, the provisions needed for the return march, and most of the livestock with a fifty-man guard.

Although no attacks had occurred, signs of Indians were numerous. Expecting resistance, on the night of September 12 Sullivan sent a twenty-six-man scouting party under Lt. Thomas Boyd, of the 1st Pennsylvania Regiment, to reconnoiter ahead. Sullivan's caution was justified, for between the time Boyd moved out and the time he started back on the morning of September 13, Butler with at least six hundred Indians and Tory Rangers had laid an ambush di-

rectly in front of the advancing army. Stumbling into this ambush from the rear, Boyd's detachment sprung the trap. Nine scouts escaped, Boyd and one soldier were captured, and the rest were killed; but the shooting alerted Sullivan, and Butler's plan was thwarted. With this development, Butler abandoned all resistance plans and withdrew to Fort Niagara.

On September 14, the Americans moved to Genesee, where they found the bodies of Boyd and the soldier captured the previous day. Both men had been horribly tortured, and their bodies hideously mutilated. It was with fierce enthusiasm, therefore, that the troops burned the town and destroyed the acres of crops around it, the task taking until noon on the following day.

Also on September 14, Colonel Brodhead's expedition completed its operation. From the upper Seneca towns, this force had moved back down the Allegheny, following the river to Venango, moving thence to Fort Pitt. As it proceeded, it devastated the cultivated areas and the towns it had passed on the way up. Many of the men, Brodhead reported, were "barefooted and naked" but "they disdained to complain" and he had lost "neither man nor Beast." He concluded that "I have a happy presage that the counties of Westmoreland, Bedford & Northumberland. . . will experience the good effect."

As for Sullivan's force, its return march was uneventful. Detachments fanned out to devastate the west side of Seneca Lake and both sides of Cayuga Lake. Having reassembled at the Chemung River, the troops reached Tioga Point on September 30, moved downriver to Wyoming by boat, then marched to Easton, which they reached on October 15, at which time the regiments dispersed to their home stations.

Sullivan reported the destruction of forty Indian towns and at least one hundred sixty thousand bushels of corn. His force, and Brodhead's on a smaller scale, had struck a severe blow. By September 20, over five thousand Indians had fled to Fort Niagara, where they had to be fed from sparse British supplies. Indian raiding would resume, but never again on the scale reached in 1778 and the first half of 1779. More important, the unity which had marked the Iroquois Confederation's activities had been permanently destroyed.